

November 28, 2005

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STENEHJEM LAUNCHES NORTH DAKOTA “COLD CASE INVESTIGATIONS”

BISMARCK – Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem launched the state’s new “Cold Case Investigations” squad and web page.

“Someone may be keeping a terrible secret. As unsolved cases grow colder, a murderer may be growing more confident that the secret is safe. Victims and their families are entitled to know that law enforcement never rests when it comes to solving the most serious offenses, and that we work continuously to bring offenders to justice,” said Stenehjem. “Unlike most other criminal cases, there is no statute of limitations for homicide cases, so with sufficient evidence a prosecution can take place at any time, as long as the perpetrator is still alive.”

The Cold Case Investigations squad will work closely with local law enforcement and the state’s attorney to review original investigative files. The squad has two permanent members who are with the Bureau of Criminal Investigation. Representatives from the local law enforcement agencies in the county where the case initiated will be asked to join the investigation of the case. Several retired BCI agents and local investigators also have volunteered to assist with case investigations when needed.

“Cold Case Investigations will utilize advances in forensics and DNA technology and new investigative techniques to re-investigate evidence and explore new leads,” said Stenehjem. “Because they will focus efforts on only one or two cases at any time, the investigation will be intensive. Each case will be worked until either a charge is filed or all new leads are exhausted.”

Local law enforcement agencies will submit Missing Person or Homicide cases for review by Cold Case Investigations team. Cases will be considered against a list of criteria including: whether there is new evidence; whether the evidence was subjected to the most advanced forensic technology available; suspects were previously identified but at the time there was not enough evidence to justify filing charges; potential witnesses were not previously interviewed or existing witnesses are believed to have withheld information; or new information is now available. Based on that review, the squad will select the case or cases for reinvestigation.

“Cold Case Investigations will serve as an additional tool for local law enforcement agencies. Because the squad can enlist the services of retired BCI agents, cases can be investigated and resolved without draining local resources,” said Stenehjem.

As its first case, the Cold Case Investigations Squad will re-examine a 1987 Homicide case referred by Eddy County authorities. On October 25, 1987, the body of 35 year old Kathryn Jean Bonderson was discovered in a burning vehicle approximately one mile north of New Rockford. Initially the death was ruled a traffic fatality, however, a later autopsy revealed that Bonderson had died as a result of homicidal violence. The investigators will reexamine police files, autopsy records, and evidence and re-interview witnesses.

“As time passes, witnesses who could not or would not talk at the time of the crime may now be ready to come forward. By focusing public attention on these cases today and

providing information on our website, we hope new leads will be reported,” said Stenehjem. “Any new leads will be aggressively pursued.”

Stenehjem also launched the state’s Cold Case Investigations web page at www.ag.state.nd.us. All cases referred for additional review will be listed on the Cold Case files web page, with details about the crime and local law enforcement contact information. The case being actively investigated by the squad will be separately listed with additional details as they become available.

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